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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/13/2031  
TAGS: [CH](#) [HK](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)  
SUBJECT: CHING CHEONG DETENTION: HONG KONG JOURNALIST  
ALLEGES PRC MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SECURITY DELAYING RESOLUTION

Classified By: E/P Chief Simon Schuchat. Reasons: 1.4(b,d).

11. (C) On August 5, 2005, the PRC issued formal charges of espionage against "Straits Times" journalist Ching Cheong. On June 12, 2006, Johnny Lau, a former colleague of Ching's and a veteran China analyst, told poloff that since then there has been no satisfactory progress on Ching's case (i.e. the designation of a trial date) that might lead to his release. (Note: Both journalists worked for the PRC-controlled Hong Kong newspaper "Wen Wei Po" prior to the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, after which they resigned in protest. After June 4, Ching founded the magazine "Contemporary," which focused on Chinese political and social developments; Lau was an unidentified contributing editor. End Note.) Lau has suggested to personal contacts on the mainland that Ching's case should be transferred to court for a trial after July 1, a politically sensitive time in Hong Kong due to the anniversary of the handover and the likelihood of pro-democracy demonstrations, rather than be left in its current limbo. He suggested that a reasonable solution would be to release Ching for medical reasons; alternatively, Ching could receive a light sentence of 1-2 years imprisonment; counting time already served during the pre-trial phase, Ching potentially could be released immediately. Lau predicted that Beijing would likely expel Ching to Singapore, where he is a legal resident, rather than send him back to Hong Kong.

12. (C) Lau dismissed the PRC Government's charge that Ching was involved in espionage activities for Taiwan as "unbelievable," adding that many of Ching's Hong Kong-based friends, including those from pro-Beijing circles, remained unconvinced by the allegations. Lau did not believe that the reason for Ching's arrest was retaliation for authoring a specific article, nor was it due to his attempts to retrieve a sensitive manuscript on Zhao Ziyang. Rather, Lau alleged that a Ministry of Public Security (MPS) official, whom he declined to name, had initiated an investigation into Ching for two reasons: first, the MPS wanted to send a warning to other journalists reporting on Chinese politics; second, it wanted to demonstrate the capabilities of the MPS in ferreting out spies.

13. (C) While the allegations against Ching might be groundless, the MPS could not simply dismiss the charges or admit that it had made a mistake in detaining Ching, said Lau, as this would "hurt the morale" of the ministry. Further complicating the case was the fact that top leaders in Beijing worried that if they botched the case (i.e. sentenced him too lightly in the eyes of the MPS or too harshly in the eyes of the Hong Kong public), they might risk alienating either the MPS or high profile, pro-Beijing friends of Ching. For those reasons, delaying resolution of

Ching's case was the safest option for now, said Lau.

14. (C) When asked by poloff whether the Hong Kong Government continued to advocate for Ching's release, Lau responded that Chief Executive Donald Tsang understood the Hong Kong public's concern over Ching's case and above all else, wanted to receive credit for his release.  
Cunningham